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# Essential Conference Tips for Graduate Students

AISARA YESSENOVA

Presenting one's research at the conferences is a vital part of disseminating knowledge and findings. However, for novices it may seem a daunting experience. Fear of showcasing one's inquiry and of being not persuasive enough are common among those new to academia. In the editorial below, the NUGSE alumni will share their recommendations on taking advantages of conference participation and tackling fear.

**Dalmira Kulmaganbetova and Darina Kussainova**, *first graduates of MA Multilingual Education program. During their studies, their paper was accepted to the "Education System in Multilingual Communities: Topical Issues and New Trends" conference held in Bishkek.*

We believe that conferences help emerging researchers to start their career by interacting with other scholars in the field. In addition, conferences can boost one's confidence and help scholars to network. There are two critical aspects in attending a conference, one dealing with the technical side of a presentation, while the other considers participation and behavior.

Formatting one's presentation should consider the following elements:

- **Timing** – many conferences have strict time requirements for a paper presentation. Therefore, time management is crucial. Endless rambling around a topic will cause loss of concentration and feeling of being overwhelmed. Thus, the formula "one slide-one minute" may help presenters to reach clarity.
- **Division of sections** – clear organization helps the audience to digest information in a short period of time. Massive texts on the screen resemble the poor practice of "data dumping" and create the impression of lousy research. Thus, presenters should guide the listeners by dividing the slides into meaningful sections. For instance, background of the study, research methods, data analysis, and unexpected findings.
- **Format** – The presentation should fit the format given, whether it is a panel discussion, round table, or some other format. Timing, use of technology and visuals, and number of presenters should be in conjunction with the conference procedures. The format is negotiated in the initial stage of application.

Overall, behavior as a presenter and a listener should not be passive.

- **Participate in international conferences** – Do not be afraid of applying to large-scale international events. This international experience will allow you not only to interact with researchers from different parts of the world, but also help to introduce others to the Kazakhstani context. Research done in Kazakhstan may be an undiscovered gem for many scholars who will appreciate your input. Dare to join international conferences!
- **Be either riskier or more demanding** – When people showcase their findings, they should be confident. Lack of confidence will not help people to sound more persuasive when they defend their arguments. Apart from confident presentation, active listening skills are also vital. Do not be afraid of posing questions even to the presenters who are considered giants in their field. There are no silly or wrong questions. The ultimate goal of a conference is to learn something new and exchange knowledge with others. In this light, ask questions and get the grasp of how to behave when somebody challenges your findings. In the long run it will be useful in honing your presentation and communication skills.

*The ultimate goal of a conference is to learn something new and exchange knowledge with others.*

**Aizhan Turgumbayeva**, *alumna of MSc Higher Education program.*

Last summer I presented my research papers on two big conferences International Congress of Psychology held in Yokohama, Japan and Conference of International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology in Nagoya, Japan. It was my first experience of participating in international conferences of this level and in my opinion it is a great chance for novice researchers to get acquainted with the community and ideas. For everyone interested in international conferences, I suggest focusing on three main features: *presentation, participation and people*. These three “P”s can be helpful for those who are just entering the wonderful world of international scientific conferences.

*Presentation* of the research project is obviously the main reason of one’s decision to participate in the conference. Your major findings and ideas that might be clear for Kazakhstani (or any other local) audience might be ambiguous for international community. In this sense, it is crucial to create presentation with explanation of specific details if necessary. In general, it is a great chance to draw attention to the particular problem and highlight situation in Kazakhstan.

*Participation*, specifically active participation, is the key priority for any conference attendant. I think it would be useful to plan your schedule ahead and try to participate in panel discussions, workshops and presentations of your particular sphere of interest. Also, do not be afraid to ask questions and engage in discussions; it is a unique opportunity to receive information from the primary source and possible get an insight into new trends in your sphere.

*Professional experts and novice researchers can help you to qualitatively expand your knowledge upon the topic and see the problem from different angles.*

*People* that you can meet at conference, both professional experts and novice researchers can help you to qualitatively expand your knowledge upon the topic and see the problem from different angles. It is obvious that international conferences are the perfect platforms for communication and networking where you can meet people from all over the world with the research interest close to yours and possible be engaged in joint research projects or any other collaboration and might be lucky to get acquainted with “legendary” people in your sphere. From my experience, I got the opportunity to meet with Dr. John Berry, one of the prominent personalities in the sphere of cross-cultural research.

Most importantly, enjoy your experience participating in international conferences that undoubtedly will facilitate your professional development and let you become an influential scholar in your area.

**Aisara Yessenova**, *alumna of MA Multilingual Education program.*

I have participated at the local and international conferences and find both experiences to be rewarding. This year I have been given opportunity to represent Kazakhstan at the “Reaching the Future: Migration, Entrepreneurship, and Employment” conference in France. It was my first experience outside of the country, and I felt extremely worried about my presentation skills. However, constant practice helped to get rid of that anxiety. In general, reaching an international audience requires an advanced preparation including application process, logistics, publishing opportunities, and active networking.

Many conferences launch their call for application approximately three or four months before the submission deadline. Therefore, you should keep your eye on the deadlines. The conference organizers announce the presentation format, submission requirements, topics of the upcoming conference, and information about the keynote speakers. Often there is a word limit for the abstract that you cannot exceed. Drafting your abstract for the sake of clarity and brevity is strongly recommended. Once you receive the results, you should think of how you will reach the conference destination literally. The logistics ranges from the participation fees, travel expenses, and funding opportunities. Often, early-bird registration provides lower fees for participation and sometimes accommodation. In addition, there is a student membership that may offer discounts. Paying fees in advance and booking accommodation can help to reduce the costs. Furthermore, there may be funding opportunities that you may get from the conference organizers, your university or other institution. As observed, the requests for funding should be submitted at least one month before the conference. Again, timing is critical.

*Do not be afraid of challenging their research or asking questions – they are people too and are likely to appreciate your attention!*

During the conference you should seize all opportunities that international conference may bring. First, getting other people's perspectives enhances the open-minded approach to your research. More importantly, your findings will benefit from the feedback you receive from the audience. Your presentation may seem flawless; however, an outsider view will guide you towards a more open stance. As one of the most apparent advantages of international conferences is the opportunity to meet prominent researchers in person. Thus, try to review the list of keynote speakers, chairs, and discussants beforehand. You

may like to attend their presentations or workshops. Do not be afraid of challenging their research or asking questions – they are people too and are likely to appreciate your attention! Along with the key scholars, you may get to know many emerging scholars and like-minded peers. In other words, networking matters.

Last but not least, do the follow-up research once the conference finishes. What publishing opportunities are available? In general, many publishing houses and peer-reviewed journals attend the conferences to recruit authors. In this vein, conferences are not only about presenting, but publishing too. Also some conferences publish the conference proceedings before the conference or after the presentation. Thus, consider this opportunity as it may enhance your CV and boost career and academic prospects.

In a nutshell, conferences are vivid experiences that emerging researchers can obtain. Open-minded people, quality feedback, time and place to disseminate findings of your own research: the list of advantages that conferences offer can be endless. The best way to go is to start searching for the upcoming conferences immediately.